A FEW

PLAIN REASONS

FOR THE

BELIEF OF A CHRISTIAN.

BY

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Be ready always to give an Answer to every Man that asketh you a Reason *of the Hope that is in you.*

1 Peter iii. 15.

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INTRODUCTION.

FEW, perhaps, are ſo ignorant of the hiſtory of Revelation, as never to have heard of the attempts that have been made to impede its progreſs, and fruſtrate its ſucceſs. Few are there but muſt know, that perſons have exiſted, who have laboured by their writings to expoſe it to contempt, as a fabrication and impoſture. But however virulent or acute ſuch adverſaries might be, their power of doing miſchief was circumſcribed; nor was much to be apprehended from the diſperſion of thoſe unfounded and fallacious arguments, which, too intricate and ſubtle for common underſtandings, were confined to the peruſal of men of talents and erudition. They who were liable to be infected with the poiſon, were before provided with the antidote. Conſcious of the failure of the former enemies of Revelation in the

plan of their attack, the infidels of the preſent day have had recourſe to a different, and unfortunately, a more ſucceſsful method. No longer truſting to any influence that might be derived from the ſtrength of their arguments, deſpairing to make converts of thoſe who, from habit and education, were enabled to ſee through and expoſe their fallacies, they have turned their arms towards a quarter that promiſed more ſucceſs, and aſſailed a deſcription of perſons who, they well knew, were wholly unprepared to make an effectual reſiſtance. By confident aſſertion, by ridicule, by the groſſeſt and moſt ſhameleſs miſrepreſentations, and by every artifice that could be practiſed on the ignorant and unwary, they have too often ſucceeded in ſhaking the faith, poiſoning the morals, and perverting the underſtandings, of that middle claſs, which conſtitutes ſo valuable a portion of the community. Nominal Chriſtians only, led away by novelty and the flattering ſuppoſition of poſſeſſing ſuperior ſagacity and penetration, wholly unacquainted with the grounds of their belief, many have fallen into the ſnare; not from a conviction that Revelation is deſtitute of ſufficient proofs, but merely from having never troubled themſelves to enquire into the ſolidity of the foundation on which it reſts

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for ſupport. Indifferent to religion, they originally took it upon truſt, and conſequently were unable, in the hour of trial, to reſiſt the force with which they were attacked. The evil, therefore, it is evident, has not originated from defect of proof, but from deficiency of inveſtigation. To this cauſe much of the infidelity of the preſent times may juſtly be attributed.

With the hopes of affording ſome little aſſiſtance, in counteracting an evil of ſuch magnitude, the Writer of this Treatiſe in Defence of Revelation has been induced to make it public. He has drawn up a plain and compendious ſtatement of the principal arguments which are uſually adduced to eſtabliſh the credibility of the ſacred writings. Fully aware that many other works on the ſame ſubject, far more able and ſatisfactory than any thing that can come from him, may have already preceded his, he has only to obſerve, that nothing preciſely of the ſame nature as that which he has here taken upon himſelf, has ever reached him, or, he believes, his neighbourhood. He has endeavoured to render every argument as intelligible as he could to common capacities; to perſpicuity he has ſacrificed language, and every other conſideration. Almoſt wholly pre-

cluded, by a very retired ſituation, from acceſs to authors, who were neceſſary to help him on his way, he has been obliged to truſt, in great meaſure, to his own memory, and the ſcanty aſſiſtance which the few books within his reach were capable of affording. His only motive was to convey information to thoſe who ſtood moſt in need of it, and who were not likely to receive it from more able teachers.

Should the peruſal of this little work tend, in the ſmalleſt degree, to confirm the believer, to fix the wavering, or to convert the infidel, the whole aim of its author will be fully accompliſhed; and he will receive the moſt pleaſing recompence from the gratifying reflection, that he has contributed his part, however inſignificant, in ſupport of that cauſe, with which the beſt intereſts of man, both temporal and eternal, are ſo inſeparably united.

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REASONS, &c.

CHAP. I.

On the different Revelations of the Will of God.

MAN, we are informed, was at firſt inſtructed by his Creator himſelf; but afterwards left, for the direction of his conduct, to the light of nature, or reaſon. This law, inſcribed in the heart in the moſt intelligible characters, ſupplied the place of all other laws, in the earlier ages of the world. God, however, thought fit to let in divine light upon mankind by various and ſucceſſive gradations. He was ſometimes pleaſed to make occaſional communications to perſons whom he ſelected for that purpoſe; and at length to ſeparate one particular nation from all others, which he vouchſafed to enlighten by an extraordinary revelation, and to govern by a law which he himſelf preſcribed and appointed for their obſervance. This law required not only an obedience to the law of nature, which was univerſally obligatory

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on all mankind, but ordained peculiar rites of religious worſhip, and thoſe judicial regulations by which their civil government was afterwards to be adminiſtered. In ſucceeding times, prophets, divinely inſpired, were occaſionally ſent amongſt them, to correct their errors, and inculcate the neceſſity of that moral virtue, which had been nearly ſwallowed up in their unbounded attachment to exterior forms and oſtentatious ceremonies.

At length, when the time appointed for this important purpoſe had arrived, God was pleaſed to make that full, perfect, and final diſcovery of his will, which was to be the end and conſummation of all former revelations; and to ſend the Saviour of mankind, not to one favoured nation, as Moſes had been, but with offers of ſalvation for the general acceptance of the whole human race. By this laſt diſpenſation, doctrines utterly unknown before, or at beſt but imperfectly underſtood, have been made level with the apprehenſions of the commoneſt hearers; duties have been taught which related to men of all deſcriptions; and the warmeſt affection for the intereſts of religion excited in the heart, inſtead of frigid acquieſcence, or undiſguiſed contempt. The nature and attributes of the Deity, the certainty not only of a future exiſtence but of a future retribution, the means by which our infirmities are ſtrengthened, and our approaches to the Almighty renewed by penitence and contrition, and indeed the knowledge of all ſaving truth, were publiſhed to the world through the medium of the Goſpel. The precepts

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delivered for the inſtruction and conduct of private life were ſuch as could not fail to excite and to receive univerſal approbation; they ſtruck at the root of every ſinful and malignant paſſion, and recommended the practice of every amiable virtue that could ſoften or adorn the human character.

Such is the account which the ſcriptures afford us of the dealings of God with man, at different periods and under different circumſtances. Every part of this grand ſcheme, which was to be completed by the miſſion of the long-promiſed Meſſiah, ſeems to agree in perfect harmony with the reſt; every thing preceding appears to have had an uniform tendency to the conſummation of the lateſt and beſt revelation of Chriſt and his Apoſtles. Now this extraordinary communication of divine knowledge, which we commonly call by the name of Revelation, is defined to be a diſcovery which God has been pleaſed to make of himſelf and of his will, in addition to that which he had before made by the light of nature or reaſon. The poſſibility of ſuch a diſcovery, no one who acknowledges an Almighty Power, can be diſpoſed to call in queſtion; and its probability may fairly be inferred, from the general ſenſe which ſo many different nations have uſually entertained of a communication and intercourſe between the Creator and his creatures. Hence we may account for the inſtitution of thoſe various rites and ceremonies, which every nation pretended to have received from their different deities; and for that eagerneſs to conſult their oracles on every emergency,

gency, for which the more refined countries of antiquity were always diſtinguiſhed. A deſire, which appears to be thus natural to man, and implanted in his heart for wiſe purpoſes, it is not unreaſonable to ſuppoſe, from the conſideration of the goodneſs of GOD, that he would vouchſafe to gratify, and to afford him fuller and more ſatisfactory information on ſuch important ſubjects, than the contemplation of external objects, or the reflections of his own mind, could, without ſuch aſſiſtance, ever have acquired.

CHAP. II.

Reasons for believing the Old Teſtament.

WHOEVER lays claim to a divine communication, muſt be able to refer to ſuch proofs as will eſtabliſh his pretenſions. He muſt produce a character of undoubted integrity, purity, and underſtanding; he muſt ſatisfy us, that he is not a perſon likely to impoſe on others, or to be impoſed on himſelf; he muſt make it evidently appear, that he has no private intereſts to ſerve, but that he means only to promote the glory of GOD and the happineſs of mankind. Moreover, it is neceſſary to examine into the

Revelation must appeal to Miracles as its credentials. Cappe.

the intrinſic merits of the revelation itſelf, that we may ſee whether its contents are ſuch, as we may reaſonably ſuppoſe were likely to proceed from a divine origin. We ſhould naturally look for ſuch a repreſentation of the Supreme Being, and his glorious attributes, as are agreeable to our conceptions; we ſhould expect to find ſuch doctrines and precepts as moſt readily conduce to human felicity and improvement; and every other circumſtance, which could induce us to believe that it originated from that high authority, by which it pretends to have been produced. And laſtly, in order to remove every doubt on ſo important a ſubject, recourſe muſt be had to thoſe extraordinary proofs of a divine commiſſion, the power of predicting future events, and performing miraculous and ſupernatural works, which cannot fail to ſtamp it with the ſeal of authenticity, and to afford the cleareſt conviction that it is derived from and atteſted by GOD himſelf.

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These are ſome of the diſtinguiſhing marks by which we are enabled to judge of the probable truth of any revelation; and to this mode of trial, the revelations recorded by the ſacred writers are willingly ſubmited. So intimately connected are the diſpenſations of Moſes and Jeſus Chriſt, that the infidel has found it neceſſary to attempt the overthrow of the former, before he could hope to make any impreſſion on the latter. He was well aware, that if he could ſucceed in undermining the foundation, the ſuperſtructure muſt of courſe participate in the ruin. Both diſpenſations, therefore, muſt be equally de-

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ſended; and both ſhall now be brought to that teſt which has been already alluded to, as a fair and equitable mode of deciding on their credibility.

When we reflect on the perſonal character of the Jewiſh legiſlator, we ſhall ſoon ſee the greateſt reaſon for ſuppoſing that he was a man endowed with the moſt eſtimable qualities. We find him to have been pious, meek, unambitious, and honeſt. So far was he from aggrandizing his own kindred, that he appears to have left his poſterity in the moſt common ſtations, without any of that rank and diſtinction which he enjoyed himſelf, and which he might have tranſmitted with ſo much eaſe to his deſcendants. Had he been actuated by the uſual motives of worldly wiſdom, he would not have permitted the prieſthood to be ſettled on the family of Aaron, nor ſuffered the command of the people to be transferred to Joſhua, who was of another family and a different tribe. So ſtrict was his regard to truth, that he does not ſpare the recital of his own errors, or thoſe of his brother. Inſtead of courting popular applauſe by giving way to the prejudices and failings of his countrymen, he openly rebuked their ingratitude and diſobedience, as often as the occaſion demanded his reprehenſions; and has exhibited them to our view as hardened and rebellious, and apt to murmur and complain on the moſt trivial occaſions. Were we, indeed, to trace him through the whole of his moral character, we ſhould find it ſuch as to claim our admiration, and to command our belief in his veracity. And if we proceed to enquire into his pre-

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tenſions to ſufficient wiſdom and judgment, we muſt be ſatisfied, that by being educated in Egypt, the greateſt repoſitory of knowledge at that time in the world, he muſt have been eminently qualified, in reſpect to human attainments, to fill with propriety the important office to which he had been appointed. The whole tenor of his life, indeed, fully beſpeaks his good ſenſe and prudence, as well as the excellence and purity of his moral conduct; and ſerves as a manifeſt and undeniable proof that he was not likely to be impoſed on himſelf, or to practice an impoſition on others. And in regard to the intrinſic merits of the ſyſtem itſelf, ſo far is it from being contaminated by the prevailing idolatries of Egypt, or any other heathen nation, that we find the Deity deſcribed in it in ſuch terms, as we muſt naturally conceive belong to the Creator and Governor of the world;—we behold him repreſented as infinite in goodneſs, wiſdom, and power, and expecting from his creatures ſuch a kind of worſhip and obedience as, we muſt eaſily perceive, is a reaſonable ſervice, and conſonant with our notions of the purity and ſpirituality of ſuch a Being. Whilſt its religious precepts enjoined a gravity and decency of divine worſhip unknown to or unpractiſed by other nations, its moral and political inſtitutions were calculated to promote the proſperity and comfort of all who had a claim to its protection and ſupport.

The prophecies that were foretold in the writings of Moſes, have been fulfilled with the greateſt clearneſs and preciſion. He recorded the curſe of Noah

on Canaan, and his future ſervitude to Shem and Japhet his brethren. The Canaanites, the ſcriptures inform us, were deſtroyed by the Iſraelites, who were deſcended from Shem. He forewarned the people, that "GOD would raiſe up, in due time, a prophet from the midſt of them, like unto himſelf, and that to him they ſhould hearken." The hiſtory of the New Teſtament acquaints us, that Jeſus Chriſt, who, like Moſes, was not only a prophet, but divinely commiſſioned to proclaim a new diſpenſation, derived his birth and lineage from a Jewiſh family. He has told us, that GOD promiſed Abraham that his poſterity ſhould be multiplied beyond that of any other man; that "his ſeed ſhould be as the ſtars of heaven, and as the ſand upon the ſea ſhore;" this, we well know, has been exactly verified; the deſcendants of a ſingle family have increaſed to a degree that almoſt ſurpaſſes belief; and are, at this day, though diſperſed far and wide, though perſecuted with unequalled and unrelenting ſeverity, remarkable inſtances of numbers and population. He admoniſhed the Jews, that dreadful would be the conſequence of their ingratitude and diſobedience; that if they forſook the law that had been given them, the LORD would afflict them with plagues, great and of long continuance; hiſtory has informed us, that theſe plagues have been greater and of longer continuance than thoſe which ever befel any other nation. To theſe might be added a long catalogue of ſuch prophecies as have already had a full and manifeſt completion; all of which uniformly tend to

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confirm the divine miſſion of him who originally predicted ſuch remote events.

As to the miraculous operations which are aſſerted to have been wrought by the Iſraelitiſh Leader in Egypt, in the paſſage through the Red Sea, and in the journey through the wilderneſs; a ſlight degree of inveſtigation will be ſufficient to convince us, that they may fairly lay claim to probability and belief. No man can reaſonably ſuppoſe, that if ſuch miracles as Moſes recorded never took place, that the impoſition could at firſt have been ſafely attempted, or afterwards delivered down for the belief of poſterity with any hopes of ſucceſs. We muſt recollect alſo, that theſe accounts were written in the ſame age in which they are repreſented to have taken place, and for the peruſal of thoſe very perſons, who, having been eye-witneſſes of the facts, were enabled to contradict the ſtatements, if they had not been founded on truth. The ſame perſons were commanded to tranſmit theſe writings to ſucceeding generations, and to read them carefully and repeatedly, that no material error or miſſtatement might go down to their deſcendants. So that, unleſs the whole body of the Iſraelites were willing to concur with their leader in fabricating an impoſture, for the expreſs purpoſe of deceiving their ſucceſſors; or that we can conceive that they could all have been over-reached by his management and dexterity, ſo as to believe in the reality of a continued ſeries of deluſions; we cannot, with any degree of reaſon, withhold our belief in the exiſtence of thoſe miracles,

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which, the ſcriptures aſſert, were performed by Moſes; and conſequently muſt acknowledge, that he has exhibited ſufficient and ſatisfactory proofs, that he derived his commiſſion and office from the hands of GOD.

But in addition to the arguments that have been already urged on behalf of the authenticity of the Moſaic writings, we have the numerous teſtimonies of Heathen hiſtorians concurring in their favour. They have declared the common belief of mankind, in regard to the principal events which he has recorded, to be agreeable to the deſcription which he has given of them. The creation of the world out of a chaos, the origin of mankind, their deſtruction by a deluge, and the re-peopling of the earth from a ſingle family, are aſſerted in every religious ſyſtem that has yet been promulgated. This belief, ſo univerſally entertained in ſo many and diſtant nations, and which has lately received an additional proof from the recent diſcoveries of the Oriental world, affords the cleareſt evidence, that the accounts could not well be the contrivance and invention of any individual. And beſides, the ſtrong attachment entertained for theſe writings for ſo many ages by the Jews themſelves, and the great probability of their being able to diſcover the impoſture, if there had been one; the exiſtence of their peculiar mode of worſhip even unto this day, not only without worldly ſupport, but in the midſt of exile, oppreſſion, and perſecution; the obſervance of rites, not only of a moſt ſingular but burthenſome nature, and which cannot have any

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poſſible recommendation, but that of having firſt been inſtituted by a divine command; theſe and many other circumſtances afford ſufficient ground for the ſuppoſition, that had not this people been convinced by the tradition of the ſame belief, from the times of thoſe who were witneſſes of the facts to their deſcendants of the preſent day, that ſuch miraculous events did really happen, as plainly pointed out the Divine interference; they would long ago have caſt off all regard for a ſyſtem, which bore ſo hard on perſons of their rebellious ſpirit and ſtubborn diſpoſition. The long duration, therefore, of this religion is an argument of great force to prove it to have had a deeper root than any other ever had, the Chriſtian only excepted. Every mode of Heathen worſhip with which we have been made acquainted, has exiſted no longer than the power that ſupported it; when that prop was removed, the whole edifice ſoon fell to pieces. The Jewiſh religion, on the contrary, ſtill ſurvives, not only unſupported by any civil eſtabliſhment, but in oppoſition to the numerous attempts that have been made to overthrow it. And if, on a fair and impartial enquiry, we are willing to admit the veracity of the Jewiſh legiſlator, we have no reaſon for withholding our belief from thoſe ſucceeding prophets, who were able to produce the ſame credentials. Their moral character, like that of Moſes, was pure and unſullied; their doctrines, like his, were agreeable to the Divine attributes; their predictions were clearly and fully verified; and their miracles of ſo ſtriking and unequivocal

quivocal a nature, as to command, from all who witneſſed them, immediate conviction. From hence, therefore, it is reaſonable to conclude, that they, like Moſes, were meſſengers inſpired and ſent by God; and conſequently, that that part of Revelation which they were commiſſioned to proclaim, poſſeſſes every mark of indubitable truth, which the naure of the thing can poſſibly admit of. And here, if it be allowable to take that for granted, which, it is hoped, will be ſoon and undeniably eſtabliſhed, the divine authority of Christ and his apoſtles, their teſtimony on this ſubject muſt be final and deciſive. The Evangeliſts inform us, that our Lord took various and frequent opportunities of referring to the Jewiſh ſcriptures, as of Divine origin, and of appealing to them for the proof of many circumſtances that related to himſelf. From the evidence they afforded, he proved that he was the Meſſiah ſo long and eagerly expected; out of them he corrected and refuted his opponents; and always laboured to impress his hearers with the belief that they had proceeded from God. The apoſtles imitated the example of their Maſter. One of them has aſſured us, that "all ſcripture is given by inſpiration of God;"* and another aſſerts, that "prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God ſpoke, as they were moved by the Holy Ghoſt."†

Theſe are ſome of the arguments which are commonly made uſe of, to demonſtrate the credibility of that portion of holy writ which goes under the ap-

* 2 Tim. iii. 16. † 2 Peter i. 21.

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pellation of the Old Teſtament. The unblemiſhed character of the reputed authors; the intrinſic excellence of the matter itſelf; the foretelling ſuch events, and performing ſuch wonders, as no one could have effected, unſupported by Divine power; the corroborating teſtimonies of Heathen hiſtorians, as to particular events; the unanimous belief of the Jews; and laſtly, the atteſtation of Chriſt and his apoſtles in their favour—form together ſo ſtrong and deciſive a body of evidence, as cannot fail to remove every reaſonable doubt, and to ſatisfy every candid and unprejudiced enquirer.

CHAP. III.

Reaſons for believing the New Teſtament.

HAVING thus endeavoured to eſtabliſh the credibility of the Old Teſtament, by arguments of ſuch a popular and intelligible nature as may be eaſily comprehended by common underſtandings, I ſhall proceed to the conſideration of that laſt and nobleſt ſcheme of religion, which we find recorded by the writers of the New Teſtament.

That a perſon of the name of Jeſus Chriſt appeared in Judea in the reign of Tiberius Cæſar; that he took upon himſelf the office of a public teacher of religion; made numerous converts to the doctrines he inculcated; performed many extraordinary and miraculous works; and at length ſuffered death, at the inſtigation of the Jews, under the Roman governor Pontius Pilate;—are facts, aſſerted not only by the evangelical writers, but publicly acknowledged by thoſe Jews and Heathens, who were amongſt the fierceſt and moſt implacable enemies of Chriſtianity. Taking that for granted, therefore, which has not been denied, let us proceed on an enquiry into the grounds and reaſons that we of the preſent day have, for embracing the doctrines, and ſubmitting to the duties, which are promulgated in the goſpel of Jeſus Chriſt.

Now that theſe reaſons are of the ſtrongeſt and moſt ſatisfactory nature, and fully adequate to the conviction of every rational enquirer, I ſhall endeavour to eſtabliſh by a diſtinct conſideration of the three following propoſitions:—

1ſt. That the Founder of the Chriſtian Religion derived his commiſſion and office from God.

2dly. That He was not only inveſted with Divine authority, but was in reality that very Meſſiah, who had been ſo long promiſed, and ſo ardently expected.

3dly. That the accounts delivered down to us in the New Teſtament, relative to his life, doctrines, and character, are ſuch as are fairly entitled to our belief.

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1st. That the Founder of the Chriſtian Religion derived his commiſſion and office from GOD.

In order to prove the Divine commiſſion of Jeſus Chriſt, I ſhall have recourſe to the ſame mode of argument which I before purſued in endeavouring to eſtabliſh that of Moſes, namely, the moral purity of the character of the author; the excellence of the doctrines and precepts he inculcated; the complete accompliſhment of the events which he predicted; and the power of working miracles, with which he was inveſted.

Whatever portion of weight and reputation can be derived to a religion from the character of its author, may be ſafely claimed on behalf of Chriſtianity, in its utmoſt latitude. The deſcription given of their Maſter by his diſciples (who had witneſſed his conduct, not only in his official capacity as a public teacher, but in the more retired ſcenes of familiarity and friendſhip) is ſuch as muſt tend to exalt him in our eſtimation to the higheſt pitch of reſpect and admiration. They repreſent him as endowed with ſuch an aſſemblage of rare and excellent qualities, as were never before united in the ſame perſon. They exhibit him as a ſinleſs pattern of piety and virtue; practiſing, with the moſt exact and unremitting attention, thoſe ſacred duties, the obſervance of which he ſo forcibly impreſſed on all his followers. Eaſy and pleaſant would be the taſk, did our limits admit of it, of enlarging on his meekneſs, piety, benevolence, humility, reſignation, and fortitude; and of deducing, from a particular recital of ſuch ſplendid virtues, the fitneſs of ſuch a perſon for

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the important office of a reformer of the world; but it is ſufficient to refer to the hiſtorians of his life for a more minute detail of that conduct, which ſo well became the Teacher and example of righteouſneſs. If we compare him with other inſtructors of mankind, we cannot heſitate for a moment to acknowledge his ſuperiority. The teachers of wiſdom in the Heathen ſchools declaimed on the excellence and fitneſs of moral virtue; but they were philoſophers only in theory, and too often proved themſelves as licentious in their practice as the moſt illiterate of their followers. Mahomet, though the founder of a religion that has taken a deep root, and ſpread itſelf far and wide, had not the leaſt ſhadow of pretence either to purity of ſentiment or integrity of conduct. He recommended his doctrines, neither by the mildneſs of perſuaſion, nor the energy of conviction, but enforced the obſervance of them by the ſword; and increaſed the number of his followers by the promiſe of thoſe ſenſual gratifications and enjoyments in another world, to which he had wholly abandoned himſelf in the preſent. And when we ſtrictly ſcrutinize into the whole of the conduct even of Moſes himſelf, however excellent, as we have ſeen, his general character may be, yet was it not without ſome ſtain to ſully its brightneſs. Great was his reluctance to obey the orders of the Almighty, when he was appointed to convey the Divine commands to the king of Egypt. Nor did he always put that implicit confidence in the promiſes of God, which the long experience of his veracity and kindneſs ſo evidently demanded.

demanded. So great, indeed, were his errors, as to preclude him from partaking of thoſe ſignal bleſſings which were reſerved for his countrymen in the land of Canaan.

But againſt Jeſus Chriſt nothing has been offered, that could, in the ſmalleſt degree, fix an imputation on his character. The teſtimonies of his followers have united in its praiſe; the ſilence of his adverſaries has proved their inability to detract from or to degrade it.

But of all the arguments that conduce to the belief of the divine miſſion of Jeſus Chriſt, no one is better entitled to our notice, than that which is drawn from the nature of the things contained in his Goſpel.

Every one who has beſtowed the ſlighteſt attention on the New Teſtament, cannot but have ſeen, that the doctrines it inculcates are of the moſt peculiar excellence. It informs us, that GOD is infinite in all perfections; that he is a pure ſpirit, and muſt be worſhipped in ſpirit and in truth; that though he be exalted far above all praiſe, yet that he condeſcends to accept our prayers and thankſgivings, when offered to him by a ſincere and grateful heart;—it teaches us not only the reverence and worſhip due to our Creator, but that univerſal benevolence and unbounded charity which we owe to our fellow-creatures;—it repreſents to us the fallen ſtate of man, and the means by which he may enſure his forgiveneſs here, and admiſſion to happineſs hereafter;—it diſcovers the true nature and end of the Redeemer's character, and the terms on which our redemption

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may be purchaſed through ſuch a mediator;—it points out the certainty of a future ſtate of exiſtence and retribution, and declares, that our final allotment of happineſs or miſery will be decided by our conduct in the preſent life. Theſe are ſome of the important *doctrines* which are elucidated and aſcertained by the Chriſtian diſpenſation. And as to the *morality* of the Goſpel, that has always been allowed to excell every other ſyſtem that has yet been offered to the world. Not only does it contain all the moſt excellent rules that have been recommended by philoſophers for the conduct of life, but refines and improves them to the higheſt ſtate of purity and holineſs; it commands us "to be perfect, even as our Father which is in heaven is perfect;" to avoid not only the commiſſion of evil, but even its moſt ſecret intention or conception. The moral law has ſaid, "thou ſhalt not kill;" Chriſt has required us not to give way to violent or unneceſſary anger. The ſame law has forbidden the commiſſion of adultery; Chriſt has aſſerted, that "if a man even look upon a woman to luſt after her, he hath committed adultery with her in his heart." In ſhort, "whatſoever things are lovely, whatſoever things are pure, honeſt, juſt, and of good report," we are commanded to put in practice, not from the deſire of obtaining human applauſe, but from a principle of duty and obedience to God.

And if the doctrines and precepts of the Goſpel are thus pre-eminent in excellence, well may we claim the ſame ſuperiority for the different *motives* that induce us to accept it.

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The wiſeſt of the Heathens confeſſed their inability to hold forth ſufficient incentives to their followers, to make them perſevere in the duties they recommended; they attempted to advance beyond the narrow limits of the preſent life, but were ſoon involved in perplexity and darkneſs. Though they entertained ſome faint hopes of a future recompence, they only ſpoke of it with heſitation and doubt; and admitted the precarioufneſs of any brighter proſpect for the virtuous, than that of virtue being its own reward. If we refer to the Moſaic diſpenſation, we ſhall find nothing held forth beyond the good things of this life. If the Iſraelites followed the directions of GOD, if they humbled themſelves before him, and were grateful for his favours, they were comforted with the promiſe of great temporal bleſſings; ſuch as, a pleaſant and fruitful land, victory over their enemies, length of days, and a long train of proſperous deſcendants. In theſe things conſiſted the reward of their obedience; nor were any poſitive aſſurances given them by their leader, that could clearly warrant the expectation of further recompence.*—Nor have the diſciples of Mahomet any

* If we take the words of the covenant, which Moſes made between GOD and his people, in their ſtrict ſenſe, they can only have a reference to temporal proſperity; but it muſt be allowed, that from the tenor of the promiſes made to their forefathers, the Jews might reaſonably conclude, that bleſſings of an higher nature were to be underſtood. Many paſſages might be cited out of the Old Teſtament, which ſhew, that they looked for greater and more ſubſtantial happineſs than the enjoyment of an earthly Canaan.

greater

greater reaſon to look forward to futurity with certainty or ſatisfaction. Though the founder of their religion declared his authority to be of ſupernatural origin, he exhibited no proofs by which its truth could be aſcertained; nor left behind him any ſtronger aſſurances than his own aſſertions, that his followers ſhould enjoy even the ſenſual paradiſe, with which he dazzled their imaginations.—But far different are the motives that invite the Chriſtian to the performance of his duty. He has not only the path clearly pointed out, in which he is to walk; but is informed to what it leads, and where it is to terminate. He has the conſequences of his actions placed before his view, in the moſt ſtriking colours; he is expreſsly taught, that the preſent life is but the dawn of his exiſtence; and that on his good or evil conduct here, will depend his happineſs or miſery hereafter. If he be willing to accept the gracious terms of ſalvation that are offered him; if he will ſtrive to go on, "perſevering and abounding in the work of the LORD;" he is aſſured, that his "labour ſhall not be in vain," and that there is laid up for him, "in the heavens, a crown that is incorruptible, and never to fade away." But, on the other hand, if he reject the bounty of GOD; if he give himſelf up to the dominion of his paſſions, and break through thoſe rules which are preſcribed for his obſervance; he is clearly forewarned of the dangers that await him; and taught to look forward to his future portion in that dreadful ſtate, where the "worm never dieth, and the fire is never extinguiſhed."

Such

Such is the intrinſic excellence of the matter contained in the Goſpel; ſuch are the *doctrines*, *precepts*, and *motives*, which are held forth as proofs of the Divine origin of that revelation, which Chriſt was commiſſioned to proclaim to mankind.

But as a ſtill ſtronger proof of the Divine energy which attended his miniſtry, our LORD foretold many extraordinary events, all of which have been exactly accompliſhed. The ſame Goſpel that contains the prediction of his ſufferings, death, reſurrection, and aſcenſion, records alſo its full and manifeſt completion. He promiſed his diſciples, that they ſhould be endowed with power from on high; ſhould be "baptized with the Holy Ghoſt," and be enabled to "ſpeak with tongues." This promiſe was moſt wonderfully made good on the day of Pentecoſt, when theſe ſupernatural gifts were beſtowed on the apoſtles. He foretold, that the Goſpel ſhould be "preached to all nations" before the deſtruction of Jeruſalem, or within the ſpace of forty years; that the increaſe of his kingdom ſhould be like "that of a grain of muſtard ſeed;" and that being lifted up, he would "draw all men after him." This was ſo ſtrikingly verified, that St. Paul, in his Epiſtle to the Romans, informs us, that even at that time, only twenty-four years after the death of Chriſt, "the ſound of it was gone out into the uttermoſt parts of the earth;" and in his Epiſtle to the Coloſſians, only twenty-nine years after the ſame event, that it "was preached to every creature under heaven." But inſtead of enumerating the various

prophecies

prophecies which were afterwards accompliſhed, it will be ſufficient to notice, under this head, that moſt celebrated and ſignal prediction of our LORD, concerning the deſtruction of the city and temple of Jeruſalem, which we find detailed by St. Matthew, in his twenty-fourth chapter. The tragical hiſtory of this great event, as we find it deſcribed by Joſephus from his own obſervation, ſo exactly coincides with this amazing prophecy, that it has more the appearance of having been the work of a Chriſtian, who had attempted its illuſtration, than that of a Jew and an enemy to Chriſtianity. Chriſt foretold the deſtruction of the temple in theſe words, "Seeſt thou theſe great buildings? There ſhall not be left one ſtone upon another which ſhall not be thrown down." Joſephus informs us, that Titus commanded his ſoldiers to dig up the very foundations of the temple and city. "He will ſend forth his armies, and deſtroy theſe murderers, and burn up their city." The hiſtory acquaints us, that Titus exerted himſelf to preſerve theſe magnificent edifices in vain, which were deſtroyed by his ſoldiers, in direct oppoſition to his moſt poſitive commands. "Thine enemies ſhall caſt a trench around thee, and compaſs thee round, and keep thee in on every ſide;" we are aſſured, by the authority of the Jewiſh hiſtorian, that Titus, (though the undertaking was deemed impracticable) ſucceeded in building a wall of thirty-nine furlongs, having on it thirteen towers, in the ſpace of three days, which ſo entirely encompaſſed the city, as to preclude all poſſibility of eſcape.

Jeruſalem,

Jeruſalem, continues the prophecy, ſhall be "trodden down of the Gentiles;" this ſo exactly came to paſs, that Veſpaſian commanded the whole land of Judea to be ſold to thoſe Gentiles that would buy it; and Hadrian, ſixty-three years after, made a law, that no Jew ſhould come into the region round about Jeruſalem. Thus it came to paſs, ſays an eminent eccleſiaſtical writer,* that the Jews being baniſhed thence, and there being a conflux thither of aliens, it became a city and colony of the Romans, and was, in honour of the Emperor, named Œlia. The prophecy ſtates, that GOD would preſerve his faithful ſervants from theſe impending dangers; "that they who endured to the end ſhould be ſaved," and not "a hair of their heads ſhould periſh." If the writers of that age are worthy of credit, we have every reaſon to believe that the Chriſtians eſcaped the ruin which came upon the Jews, and that not one of that deſcription periſhed when Jeruſalem was taken. The Jews were not only to ſee an end both of their civil and religious government, but according to the prediction of Chriſt, were "to be led captives into all nations." Titus, we are told by Joſephus, took ninety-ſeven thouſand captives, and ſent them into Egypt, and the different Roman provinces; from whence they were again diſperſed, as we ſee them at this day, into all the countries and climates of the earth.

From the few inſtances that have been now brought forward, of the accompliſhment of the events that

* Euſebius.

were

were predicted by Chriſt, no man, one ſhould imagine, could reaſonably doubt, that he was endowed with the exerciſe of ſupernatural power; and that he has exhibited ſufficient and ſatisfactory proof, that he was inveſted with authority by God himſelf.

The laſt argument to which I ſhall have recourſe, to prove the divine miſſion of Jeſus Chriſt, is one of the moſt cogent and unanſwerable nature—that which ariſes from the conſideration of the miracles which he ſo frequently performed.

Now the miracles of Chriſt were great and numerous. He gave eyes to the blind, ears to the deaf, words to the dumb, limbs to the lame, underſtanding to the lunatic, and life to the dead. Theſe, and many other works of the moſt extraordinary and aſtoniſhing nature, he conſtantly appealed to as concluſive evidences of his divine authority. Such, indeed, was the effect they produced, not only on his diſciples, but even on his greateſt enemies, that the chief prieſts and Phariſees were forced to confeſs, that "this Man doeth many wonders;" and that "if he was let alone, all men would believe in him." So numerous were they, that the multitude cried out, "When Chriſt cometh, will he do more miracles than this man hath done." So great and powerful, that even Herod ſtiled them "mighty works;" and Nicodemus acknowledged, that "no man could do ſuch works as he did, unleſs God were with him." The apoſtles confidently appeal to the knowledge of their hearers, when they allude to the miraculous works of their Maſter. "Jeſus of Nazareth,"

Nazareth," ſays St. Peter, "was a man approved amongſt you by miracles, ſigns, and wonders, which GOD did by him in the midſt of you; this, indeed, ye yourſelves know." The ſame apoſtle appeals alſo to the knowledge of this by the centurion and his friends; "ye know," ſays he, "the thing done throughout all Judea, how Jeſus, being anointed with the Holy Ghoſt and with power, went about doing good, and healing all that were oppreſſed with the devil; for GOD was with him." And laſtly, we have the teſtimony of Chriſt himſelf on the ſame ſubject, "If I had not done amongſt them," ſays he, "thoſe works which never man did, they had not had ſin." When, therefore, we take into conſideration the exemplary character of Jeſus Chriſt, the intrinſic excellence of the meſſage which he brought, the exact completion of the events which he foretold, and the wonderful effects of the miracles which he performed; we have ſurely every reaſon to conclude, that "GOD was with him;" and that the religion which he came into the world to inſtitute, has every claim to be regarded as of Divine origin.

2dly. That He was not only inveſted with Divine authority, but was in reality that very Meſſiah, who had been ſo long promiſed, and ſo ardently expected.

To enumerate the whole of the prophetic expreſſions in the Old Teſtament, that relate to the Meſſiah, would be to extend the ſubject to a far greater compaſs than is conſiſtent with the deſign of the preſent treatiſe. I ſhall content myſelf, therefore, with bringing into a ſhort and ſummary view ſome of the leading

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ing particulars of thoſe predictions, which the Jewiſh doctors, who preceded the time of our LORD's appearance, always applied to the expected Meſſiah.

GOD, it appears, firſt opened his intention on this ſubject in a *general* manner, promiſing, that the ſeed of the woman ſhould "bruiſe the ſerpent's head."* To Abraham we find a *particular* aſſurance given, that "in his ſeed all the nations of the earth ſhould be bleſſed;"† and the ſame renewed afterwards to Iſaac‖ and Jacob.‡ To the latter the particular tribe of Judah was pointed out, as that out of which the great Deliverer of Mankind was to ariſe. To David it was revealed, that this illuſtrious perſon ſhould be of his family, and "the fruit of his body;"§ to Micah,¶ that he ſhould be born at Bethlehem; to Iſaiah,° that his birth ſhould be miraculous, and his mother a virgin; to the ſame prophet' were confided the beneficial effects of his death and ſufferings; to Daniel,' the preciſe time when he was to be ſacrificed; to Haggai,' Zechariah,' and Malachi,' that all theſe ſurpriſing events ſhould be accompliſhed before the deſtruction of the ſecond temple; and to the latter, the precedence of a forerunner, who was to give notice of his approach, and "prepare the way before him." To this we may add the exact deſcription of his meek and affectionate manners, of the intrinſic excellence of his

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* Gen. iii. 15. † Gen. xxii. 18. ‖ Gen. xxvi. 4.
‡ Gen. xlix. 10. § Pſ. cxxxii. 11. ¶ Micah v. 2.
° Iſaiah vii. 14. ' Iſaiah liii. ' Dan. ix. 24. &c.
' Haggai ii. 7. 9. ' Zech. xiv. ' Mal. iii. iv.

doctrines,

doctrines, the miracles by which his miſſion was to be confirmed, and every other circumſtance relative to his life, death, reſurrection, and aſcenſion, as well as to the important office which he was appointed to ſuſtain. Whoever, then, will beſtow a candid and attentive peruſal on thoſe wonderful prophecies which relate to the Meſſiah, and compare them with the accounts given by the evangeliſts of Jeſus of Nazareth in the New Teſtament, cannot fail to be convinced of the preciſe agreement of the circumſtances of the life and character of the latter with thoſe ſo clearly predicted of the former. And as no other perſon has yet appeared amongſt men, that anſwered, in the ſmalleſt degree, to this prophetic deſcription; and as the Meſſiah was univerſally expected to appear in the ſame country, and at the ſame time, that Jeſus of Nazareth actually did; when we bring all theſe arguments into one point of view, we cannot heſitate to admit, that the continued ſeries of prophecies relative to this great Deliverer and Saviour have received their completion, and to acknowledge, in the words of holy writ, that "Jeſus is the Chriſt."*

* To every one deſirous of examining for himſelf on this important ſubject, it is recommended to compare the 52d and 53d chapters of Iſaiah with the 26th and 27th of the Goſpel of St. Matthew. So exactly are the predictions of the prophet fulfilled, by the events that are recorded by the Evangeliſt, that it ſhould ſeem reaſonable to ſuppoſe, that no honeſt infidel could, after ſuch a compariſon, remain unconvinced. The effect it had on a celebrated character of the laſt age, the witty but profligate Earl of Rocheſter, is well known; though long a profeſſed unbeliever, he was unable to withſtand ſuch powerful evidence; and declared himſelf to be convinced, by a compariſon of theſe different parts of holy writ, of the truth of the revelation of Jeſus Chriſt.—*Biſhop Burnet.*

Theſe prophecies were not only applied to the Meſſiah by the Jewiſh doctors, but were often appealed to by Chriſt and his apoſtles; the latter, indeed, when preaching to the Heathens, generally waved the argument from prophecy, (becauſe their hearers were not ſo capable of judging of it) and chiefly inſiſted on that which aroſe from the numerous miracles which had been wrought by their Maſter, particularly that moſt ſignal one—his reſurrection from the dead. But when they had occaſion to diſpute with the Jews, they conſtantly referred to the ancient records in their own collection of the law and the prophets, in which ſo many things were expreſsly foretold, that had been exactly and literally fulfilled in Jeſus of Nazareth. Theſe prophecies, greatly to the confirmation and advantage of the Chriſtian cauſe, are extant, even at this day, in the original language; and have been preſerved, not only by the friends and ſupporters of the Goſpel, but by its unceaſing and moſt implacable adverſaries and oppoſers.

3dly. That the accounts delivered down to us in the New Teſtament, relative to his life, doctrines, and character, are ſuch as are fairly entitled to our belief.

When perſons relate any matter of fact, it is uſual to determine, from the character they bear, the degree of credit that is to be attached to their aſſertions. When, on enquiry, we find in the witneſſes, not only an unblemiſhed integrity, but ſufficient knowledge and penetration to aſcertain the truth of

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the circumſtances they atteſt; when we are certain, that they could not well be deceived themſelves, nor were likely to attempt an impoſition on others, we may ſafely acquieſce in the validity of the teſtimony thus voluntarily brought forward. Now if we apply theſe rules to the evangeliſts and apoſtles, we ſhall ſoon be convinced that they are by no means defective in any ſuch marks of true hiſtorians. If we examine into their integrity, we muſt ſoon perceive, from the tenor of their writings, that they were incapable of propagating a wilful impoſture. Their giving an account of their errors and imperfections, of their mean extraction and employments, their ambitious contentions, and their denial and deſertion of their Maſter in his diſtreſs, is an argument of great force in favour of their veracity in other reſpects. They might have concealed every thing that tended to lower them in the publick eſtimation with the greateſt eaſe, as it was not eſſential to the Chriſtian faith that it ſhould be tranſmitted to poſterity. If, therefore, they have recorded tranſactions that were likely to leſſen their own characters, we cannot well require a more ſatisfactory proof of their ſtrict and impartial regard to truth in every other circumſtance which they have aſſerted in their narratives. And beſides, they ſpoke of ſuch things only as they had ſeen or heard themſelves, or had been informed of by others who had had ocular demonſtration. They have plainly ſhewn, by the general ſtrain of good ſenſe and judgment which runs through their writings, that they were not likely to be deceived by

impoſition; and the circumſtances they deſcribe are of ſuch a nature, as not to admit of error or deluſion. Had they been inclined to impoſe on the world by the fabrication of a falſhood, they could not have expected to ſucceed in the deception. They wrote their accounts but a ſhort period after the death of their Maſter, at a time when multitudes were ſtill alive, who had been witneſſes of the different facts which they related, and who, if an opportunity had offered, would gladly have come forward to detect and diſgrace them. It is indeed highly improbable, that a ſet of men ſhould have united to aſſert, that a perſon, called Jeſus of Nazareth, had come from GOD, revealed eternal life, confirmed his doctrines by miracles, ſuffered death, and after three days had riſen again from the grave; and after this, that the Holy Ghoſt had viſibly deſcended on his diſciples, on the day of Pentecoſt, and enabled them to ſpeak all languages; that from thence they had been diſperſed through all nations, and had confirmed their preaching by the operation of ſigns and wonders; it is, I ſay, not worthy of the ſlighteſt degree of credit, that ſuch a narrative ſhould have been attempted by the apoſtles, or ſuffered to be propagated by the Jews, (whoſe intereſt it was to put a ſtop to it) had it not been founded on facts, the exiſtence of which had been clearly and publickly aſcertained. But even were we to ſuppoſe that the apoſtles were inclined to practice ſuch an impoſition, with what poſſible view could they have been led to attempt it? Men are not often found to do miſchief for miſchief's ſake,

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even when they may do it with impunity. How much more improbable then is it, that men ſhould do it, when ſo far from having the proſpect of advantage before them, they were certain of incurring the greateſt danger? Had they wiſhed to acquire the honours or riches of the world, they took the worſt poſſible method that could have been deviſed to attain them, as the doctrines they taught were in direct oppoſition to the inclinations of thoſe who were able to promote their private intereſts. They muſt have been already convinced, from the fate of their Maſter, that nothing but evil was reaſonably to be expected from preaching a doctrine, which had been to the "Jews a ſtumbling-block, and which would, probably, by the Greeks, be accounted fooliſhneſs." They muſt have been well aware, that their perſeverance in the ſame cauſe would eventually expoſe them, as it before had Him, to contempt, poverty, impriſonment, and death.

The laſt argument to which I ſhall have recourſe, to prove the credibility of the apoſtolic teſtimony, ariſes from the agreement of the different writers, as to the material facts which they have related. If ſeveral perſons, who were diſperſed throughout different nations, and cut off from any communication with one another, were to write accounts of the ſame tranſactions, and to agree with the greateſt exactneſs in their relation of the principal events they had undertaken to deſcribe; ſo far would any little diſagreement, in regard to matters of an indifferent nature, be from bringing diſ-

credit

credit on their teſtimony, that it would be a convincing proof that they had not invented the ſtory in conjunction. Had they united in propagating the ſame falſhood, they would have taken care to have agreed preciſely in the circumſtances; had they fabricated ſeparate accounts, they could not poſſibly have agreed with ſo much nicety in the material facts. The harmony, therefore, ſo viſible in their narratives in regard to things eſſential, and their difference in thoſe of a more trivial nature, cannot fail to afford to any reaſonable perſon a good and ſolid argument for the credibility of the whole.

If, then, the veracity of the ſacred writers appear to be unqueſtionable, it follows, that the New Teſtament muſt have come from GOD, as they have aſſured us, that they proclaimed it to the world under the directing inſtuence of his holy ſpirit. How far, indeed, this ſupernatural influence extended, or in what particular manner it was afforded, the plain unlettered Chriſtian will not find himſelf concerned to inveſtigate. It will be ſufficient for him to be perſuaded, that the promiſe of our LORD to his diſciples, was accurately fulfilled, that "when the Comforter ſhould come, he ſhould bring all things to their remembrance, what he had ſaid unto them." We may ſafely conclude, that the ſame Spirit which gave them utterance when they were preaching the Goſpel, preſided over the accounts which they compoſed for the inſtruction of poſterity, and enabled them to record, in a faithful and infallible manner, the whole will of GOD—every thing that was neceſſary for us to know, believe, or practiſe, in order to enſure our final ſalvation.

CHAP. IV.

Reasons for believing the present Scriptures to be agreeable to the original.

IT only remains now to enquire, whether we have or have not ſufficient grounds to believe, that the books which we commonly receive under the name of the Scriptures, contain the genuine and authentic writings of thoſe perſons to whom they are aſcribed. On this part of our ſubject, it will be ſufficient to bring forward an abridgment of ſuch arguments as are uſually referred to in ſupport of the affirmative.

Nothing could exceed the care and attention of the Jewiſh nation to preſerve their records from alteration or corruption. By the command of Moſes,* the book of the law was depoſited in the tabernacle not long before his death, as were the other ſacred books, as ſoon as they were produced. They were afterwards removed by Solomon† into the Temple, which was allotted for the reception of the future compoſitions of the inſpired writers.

If the originals periſhed in the flames of the Temple, (a fact that has not been aſcertained) there can be no doubt but that numerous copies were carefully preſerved during the Babyloniſh captivity, from

* Deut. xxxi. 26. † 1 Kings viii. 3, 9. which

which Ezra was enabled to make an authentic ſelection, and to depoſit it, increaſed by the additional works of the later prophets, in the ſecond temple. Whether the copy which remained in the ſame ſacred repoſitory at the time of the deſtruction of Jeruſalem by Titus, were the ſame as that made by Ezra or not, we have no reaſon to ſuppoſe it to have been ſpurious or incorrect; as we do not find that the later Jews were more negligent in preſerving this valuable treaſure, than thoſe who had preceded them. We may fairly indeed infer from the ſilence of Chriſt on this head, that the writings then received as the the works of Moſes and the prophets, were pure and unſuſpected; for although often induced to reproach the ſcribes and teachers with the falſhood of their doctrines, we do not find that he ever charged them with any wilful attempts to alter or corrupt the ſacred oracles that had been committed to their charge. And after the deſtruction of Jeruſalem, and the diſperſion of the Jews into different nations, it muſt be evident, from the vaſt multiplication of copies, that intentional corruption was no longer in their power. Beſides, from that time, the converts to Chriſtianity were equally intereſted with the Jews themſelves, in preſerving the ſource of their doctrines from error and pollution. As Chriſtianity was to be proved out of the law and the prophets, it was the buſineſs of Chriſtians to take eſpecial care that they might be able to appeal to ſuch teſtimony, as could not be denied to be the plain and undiſputed word of God.

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The books of the New Teſtament, being far leſs ancient, are the more eaſily proved to be genuine and authentick. It is known that they were written either by the Apoſtles of Chriſt themſelves, or by thoſe who wrote under their direction; theſe books were received as ſuch in the apoſtolical age itſelf, ſome of the firſt Chriſtian writers, as Ignatius and Polycarp, living long enough to ſee the canon generally received and ſettled. They were quoted by a long ſucceſſion of writers, from the apoſtolical times to the preſent. They were at a very early period collected into a diſtinct volume, were ſoon diſtinguiſhed by particular titles, tranſlated into different languages, explained by numerous commentaries, expounded in publick aſſemblies, appealed to by contending ſects, and referred to by the greateſt enemies of the Chriſtian cauſe. And when, in addition to this evidence, we take into the account the diſperſion of the Chriſtians into ſo many diſtant countries, and the numerous copies and tranſlations that muſt have been in their poſſeſſion, we cannot but admit the extreme improbability of the ſucceſs of any attempt, which tended to ſubſtitute falſe books inſtead of true, or to vitiate the true ones to any conſiderable degree.

Such are the grounds on which we are called upon to acquieſce in the canon of the Old and New Teſtaments, and to receive them as containing, without any material alteration, the authentick writings of the ſacred authors to whom they are attributed.

CHAP. V.

Additional Reasons for believing in the Divine Origin of Christianity.

IN addition to the arguments already brought forward, I have only to advert to the confirmation that Chriſtianity has often received from the events that have taken place ſince it was firſt promulgated. When we conſider the rapid and extenſive propagation of doctrines, which, ſo far from according with the common ſentiments of mankind, were in direct contradiction to them; when we reflect, that a few plain men, of the loweſt origin and education, went forth, armed only with the weapons of faith and truth, to encounter the power of princes, the bigotry of prieſts, the wiſdom of philoſophers, and the prejudices of the populace; when we recollect that theſe things took place, not in a dark age or uncivilized country, but in times and places celebrated for the refinements of elegance and learning; when, I ſay, we take all theſe circumſtances together, it is ſurpriſing that even truth itſelf, under ſo many diſadvantages, ſhould have had ſo complete and illuſtrious a triumph; and can be rationally accounted for by no other means, but that of the extraordinary interpoſition of Almighty GOD in its favour and ſupport.

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Another argument which may be urged on behalf of the Chriſtian religion, is drawn from the conſideration of the beneficial conſequences that have already attended it. Were we to compare the preſent ſtate of mankind with that of thoſe who lived under the light of nature only, we ſhould immediately perceive the ſuperiority of the former, both civil and religious;—we ſhould be convinced, that the great and viſible change which has taken place in the world, has been owing to the obſervance of a religious ſyſtem, which has preſcribed ſuch duties and regulations to mankind, as are beſt adapted to their wants, and ſuited to their convenience;—we ſhould ſoon be led to acknowledge, that it has paved the way for the eſtabliſhment of the greateſt temporal bleſſings; that it has left manifeſt traces of its genial influence on every condition of life, both publick and private; that it has entered into the conſtitutions of civil governments, and laid the foundation of thoſe laws which conduce to the general order, ſecurity, and peace; that it has deſcended into the retirement of private life, and has heightened thoſe domeſtick comforts and endearments which form ſo large a portion of human happineſs. Theſe aſſertions might eaſily be eſtabliſhed by particular proofs, could our preſent diſcuſſion be extended with convenience to ſo great a length. It will be ſufficient, however, to refer thoſe who doubt the ſuperior efficacy of Chriſtianity in bringing about ſuch important improvements, to the times when natural religion was the only ſource of information; they will then ſee, that it completely

pletely failed, not only in ſatisfying mankind as to future proſpects, but was woefully deficient in contributing to their preſent and temporal happineſs. On this head, indeed, little occaſion has the advocate for Chriſtianity to go back to the former ages of the world. They that will not allow it the credit of having meliorated and improved the condition of man, have had an opportunity of witneſſing the effects that have reſulted from its open rejection. They have ſeen men abſolved from every religious obligation, and left to their own natural propenſities, to guide their conduct towards each other; and the conſequence has been ſuch as might have eaſily been predicted; the venerable fabrick of ſocial order has been ſhaken to its baſe, and but for the timely interference of Divine Providence, muſt have been proſtrated in the duſt.

The laſt argument I ſhall adduce in ſupport of the credibility of revealed religion, ariſes from the concurring teſtimonies of the many wiſe and eminent men who have openly profeſſed their conviction of its truth. Now, although our religion wants not the authority of names, however great and illuſtrious, to defend it againſt its adverſaries, it may not be wholly uſeleſs to bring forward ſuch weighty and efficacious evidence on its behalf. A liſt of this kind might eaſily be made out, which would embrace almoſt all the diſtinguiſhed characters that have contributed to improve or adorn the world. Let us only refer to a few of our countrymen; let us appeal to the celebrated names of Bacon, Newton, Milton, Boyle, Locke,

Locke, and Addiſon. Theſe men, perhaps, it will not be denied, were endowed with as much ſagacity and penetration, and were as capable of diſcriminating between truth and falſhood as the moſt enlightened philoſophers of the preſent day; and yet theſe men were CHRISTIANS. After a long and ſerious inveſtigation of its evidences, they avowed their implicit belief in the truth of Chriſtianity; regulated their lives by its doctrines and precepts, and "departed in ſure and certain hope of the reſurrection to eternal life through Jeſus Chriſt." Let him, therefore, who feels himſelf inclined to doubt on this important ſubject, call to remembrance the ſentiments of thoſe illuſtrious men, and then put this queſtion to himſelf—Which is entitled to the greateſt reſpect, their opinion or mine? Who is the moſt likely to aſcertain the truth, they or I? Nothing, ſurely, but the groſſeſt ſelf-deluſion, can dictate any other anſwer than the true one.

Such is the foundation on which the holy ſcriptures reſt for ſupport. If the arguments that have been alledged have any weight, the inference is ſimple and apparent. He that ſhall feel a conviction of their truth, muſt ſee the immediate neceſſity of a diligent application to that ſtudy, which it is both his duty and intereſt, beyond all things, to purſue. In the Scriptures he will find every thing he is concerned to know, diſplayed in the moſt ſtriking and lively colours; he will there find the moſt infallible directions to point out his duty, and the moſt animating encouragements to the performance of it; he

he will there meet with that knowledge which will render him wiſe, "even unto ſalvation;" he will there be inſtructed in thoſe purſuits, which will eſſentially contribute to his happineſs in time, and which cannot fail to complete it in eternity.

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[Cruttwell, Printer, Bath.